

25 YEARS OF

 **HUMANIST
HOUSING
ASSOCIATION**

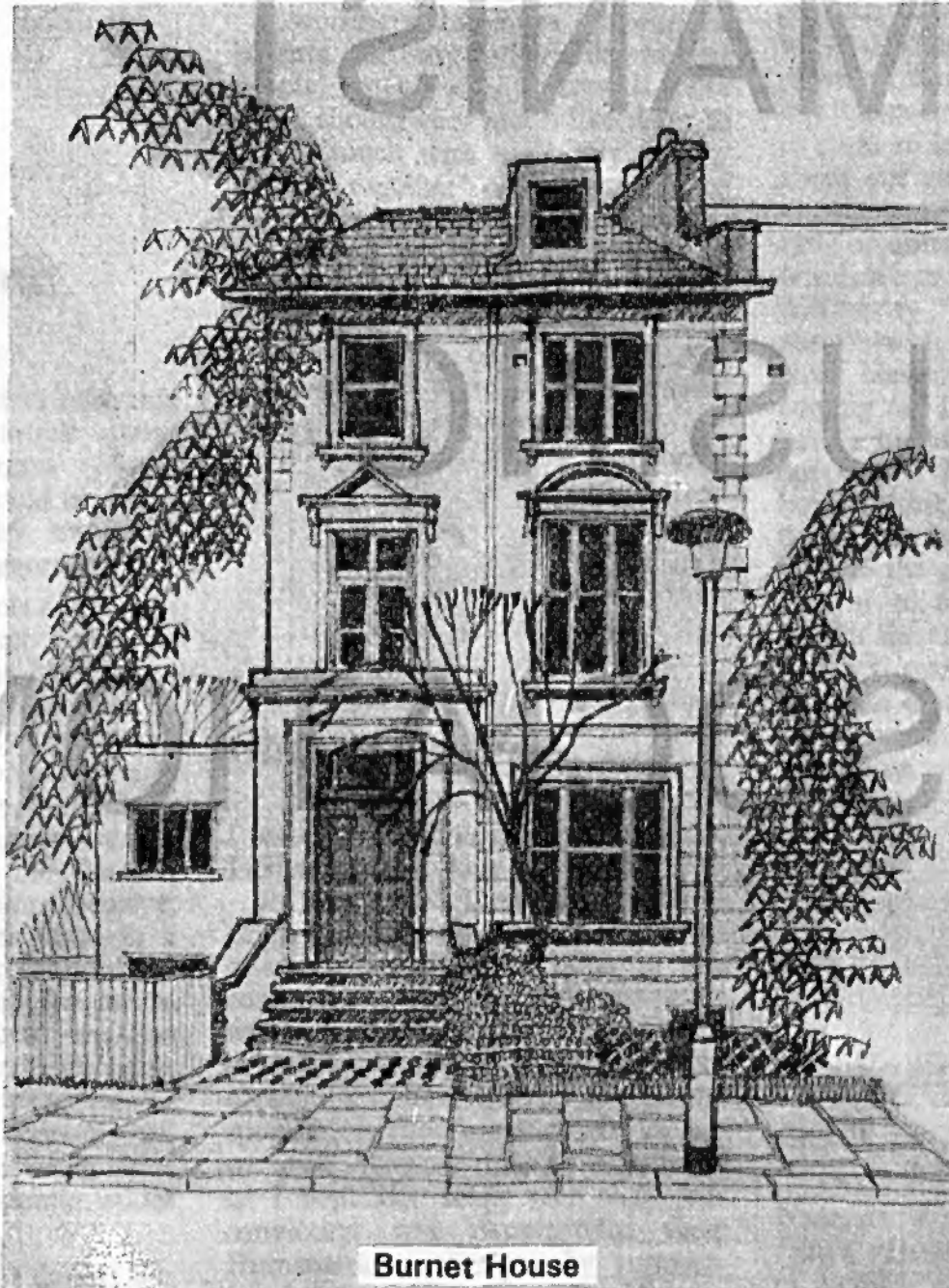
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OUR AIM

The Association exists to house people in need. We are non-profit making and are registered as a Charity. For most of our twenty-five years we have concentrated on providing sheltered housing for the elderly. Recently we have widened our activities to house single people with elderly dependents, young

people recovering from mental illness, single working people and, this year for the first time, some families.

Our first homes were in London, but as land has become more difficult to acquire, we have spread out into the Home Counties.



Burnet House

HOW WE STARTED

It was in 1954 that the Council of the Ethical Union, now the British Humanist Association, first decided to involve the Humanist Movement in a practical project in the voluntary service field. A number of possibilities were explored, and it was finally decided to register a Housing Association, which would provide sheltered housing for the elderly, particularly those in the Movement who, of course, had no access to Church-run homes. Few local authorities provided this kind of accommodation in 1954.

Our aim was to provide self-contained accommodation where elderly people of limited means could live in dignity and security, surrounded by their own possessions and establishing their own routine. We would employ a Warden to ensure that the house ran smoothly and to help anyone in special need.

In January 1955 the Management Committee of the Ethical Housing Association started work with a grant

of £75 for expenses from the Ethical Union. The first task was to start fund-raising, the second to find a suitable house for conversion into flatlets.

A public meeting was arranged in April in the Library of Conway Hall, lent to us by South Place Ethical Society. The speakers at this occasion were Mora Burnet, Richard Clements, Evelyn Denington and Robert Pollard. The ninety guests donated £400 — about £1,800 at today's values! It was then decided to issue Loan Stock at 2½ or 4 per cent and one of the first subscribers was the Hampstead Ethical Society with £50. They were quickly followed by South Place Ethical Society with £500 and by the Rationalist Press Association and the Ethical Union with £2,500 and £4,500 respectively. A grant of £3,000 from the National Corporation for the Care of Old People enabled us to start bidding for property.

Many houses were looked at before it was decided to purchase a four-storey late Victorian house in Burgess Hill. It was later named Burnet House in recognition of the tremendous dedication and work devoted to the project by Lindsay and Mora Burnet. A Mortgage and Improvement Grant were negotiated with Hampstead Borough Council, and Alan Raimes, our Architect, went ahead with conversion plans for fourteen bed-sitting room flats with their own cooking facilities and shared bathrooms, and a self-contained flat for a Warden.

Then started the problems. First came a long argument with the Ministry of Housing who had to sanction the details of the Improvement Grant. They held that central heating, even in a house for elderly people, was a luxury and could not be allowed. We persevered, and eventually got our way — the first ever grant for central heating. Then the builders went bankrupt and the neighbours got a Court injunction to stop the noise of our new central heating boiler. These and many other problems had to be overcome by the Committee, before the first tenants moved in on March 14th 1957, just over two years from starting work. Today, a project is more likely to take four or five years to complete.

The tenants soon settled down and were regularly visited by Committee Members. Friends and supporters came to parties at Christmas and in the Summer. We were visited by housing officials from all over the country, including Sir Parker Morris who praised our standards in print.

It was not until November 1960 that the Committee felt it had enough experience and resources to expand and decided that we would look for a site on which we could build. A fine site was found near the centre of Wimbledon and work started on a two-storey block of twenty self-contained bed-sitter flats, each with its own kitchen and WC. It was at this time that we started our twenty-year partnership with Clive Alexander, our Architect, who has always been particularly interested in the problems of the elderly. Blackham House, named after Harold and Olga, opened in November 1963.

Our standards were raised yet again with the opening of the first part of Rose Bush Court in 1968. This time our flats were self-contained, comprising sitting room with alcove bedroom and kitchen and bathroom. No sooner had tenants moved in than we were able to buy the adjoining semi-detached houses next door, which were demolished to make way for the second part of Rose Bush Court which opened in 1972 after the delicate operation of joining the two blocks at four levels.

Then we started working with a second Architect, Henry Osborne, who found us our first site in Pembury and has designed a number of our houses.

Since then sixteen more houses have been completed. By 1970 the Committee realised it could no longer manage efficiently without some paid staff. But we were hardly big enough to support more than a part-time secretary. Land prices were high and it was not easy to borrow money. Further expansion seemed doubtful. But we took the bold decision to invest some of our capital in salaries and asked Lindsay Burnet if he would take on the job of Housing Manager. This he did with enthusiasm and competence for a period of nearly four years and set us off on the road to expansion.

OUR HOMES TODAY

Today our homes are usually purpose built, providing small self-contained flats of hallway, two rooms, kitchen and bathroom, each linked to a Warden call system. All have gardens and communal lounges with small kitchens, and most have laundry rooms and guest rooms. In some there are flats specially designed for the disabled. We build to a high standard and try to create a warm, homely atmosphere with attractive wallpapers, carpeted corridors and plants.

One of our recent conversions is Balmoral House in Tunbridge Wells where we took over two adjoining hotels. Balmoral provides thirty bedsitter flats for those who need the additional care of having their meals provided for them. There are also shared kitchens, where residents can prepare their breakfasts and light snacks.

Our most ambitious project is at Symonds Green, Stevenage, which will provide 125 homes on a five acre site. There will be a block of sheltered flats for the elderly and some will live in one or two person bungalows, all with a Warden call system. There are also 49 flats and bungalows for small families of working age. Our Symonds Green "village" accounts for an investment of just under £1,600,000.

We now have over six hundred flats on nineteen sites.

OUR TENANTS

Residents in our homes come from all walks of life. They are chosen because of real need. We have our own waiting lists which grow so long that we have to close them from time to time, but we are also bound to select at least half our residents from local authority lists. For some, the Humanist Housing Association has provided their first real home.

Most of our residents cope very well to a great age and stay with us to the end. Mr. Binyon and Mrs. Males have both lived with us since 1963, first at Burnet House and latterly at Rose Bush Court. Mrs. Klaar, Mrs. Rennie and Mme. Zaniboni came to live in Blackham House when it opened in 1963.

Our residents do not sit around. Many have part-time jobs. Some are involved in community work, organise social events, or help neighbours less fit than themselves. Those who are less fit seem to manage well

with the aid of Home Helps, Meals on Wheels, and occasional help from neighbours and Wardens.

OUR STAFF

During our first fifteen years our Wardens were our only staff. Without committed Wardens of high calibre, organisations like ours could not operate successfully. Much of the neighbourliness and caring attitude in our homes is due to their work and example. The Warden's job is to see that their house is running smoothly and to help residents get support from the Welfare Services provided by local authorities. They help with, and in some cases organise, social activities in their house. They are not expected to give personal service to residents except in a major emergency, but many a resident has been nursed to the end by a devoted Warden.

Our first Warden was Mary Reed. She and her husband, Cliff, still keep in touch with the Association. Some Wardens have retired and become our tenants. Mrs. Hillen and her husband now live at Erica House having looked after Blackham House for fifteen years. Mrs. Owens and her husband have spent ten years with us, first at Burnet House and latterly at The Chestnuts, and hope to retire this year to live at Symonds Green.

In 1971 Lindsay Burnet started to manage the Association on a part-time basis and we acquired our first Secretary.

Today, our office staff is still very streamlined for the amount of work we have to cope with, but it grows year by year. In addition to our Director and Secretary, Peter Ward, who first joined us in 1973 as our part-time Accountant, we have a Housing Manager with an Assistant who is a qualified Social Worker, a Maintenance Manager who is a qualified Clerk of Works, an Accountant, two Secretaries and a Clerk. The number of houses we have in the Tunbridge Wells area led to the need for a full-time maintenance man there — he is the husband of one of our Wardens. Last year, because of the increasing difficulty in finding sites, we decided to invest for a year in a Property Acquisitions Manager. Sadly, the economic situation is such that this has not paid off, but we hope that 1981 may see us expanding again.

OUR MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Over the years the members of the Management Committee have been drawn from the wider Humanist Movement, and have given long and devoted service, particularly during the first fifteen years of the Association's life when it had no office staff. In recent years two tenants have been co-opted as Committee members.

The Management Committee meets at least four times a year and members also participate in the more detailed work of the sub-committees for Finance, Building and Housing Management.

From time to time working parties are set up to deal with specific short-term projects or problems. Although it is no longer possible to know all our tenants personally, our Committee members do regularly visit houses to talk to Wardens and tenants, so that they

have a good knowledge of the organisation they are managing.

We have had too many devoted and outstanding Committee members to mention individually, but one does stand out for special thanks. Whilst modestly refusing to hold office, Mora Burnet has for twenty-five years been one of the main architects of the Association's success, and certainly one of the hardest workers. She and Rose Bush visited hundreds of applicants all over London. In the early days they were shocked at the conditions in which they found elderly people living, often at the top of a tenement block with no water and no toilet facilities except at ground floor level.

OUR FINANCE

Our properties are now valued at nearly £11,000,000. Our early houses were all acquired and built with mortgages obtained from the Local Authority in whose area we were developing. In 1974, a new Housing Act extended the activities of The Housing Corporation to help the voluntary movement towards producing twenty per cent of all housing, and today most of our schemes are financed by this body. It too has suffered massive cuts as part of the control of public expenditure and the next few years will be far from easy.

During the past few years our older properties have been running at an increasing loss because service charges, including central heating and hot water, are part of the rent which has been restricted by statute to an annual increase of 75p per week. Of necessity, the Government has introduced a discretionary Deficit Grant Scheme to help associations to balance their accounts, but we meet with uncertainty and delay, and, of course, the money takes a long time to arrive. There will be a new Housing Act in 1980, and financial arrangements will change again. As we are borrowing public money, plans and finance are always tightly controlled by Department of the Environment regulations and yardsticks. Many of the things we think are essential for comfort and style are not allowed for in these capital grants.

Happily for us, the Humanist Movement has over the years produced some very generous benefactors. One of the first was a Mr. Wagner of the Sutton Group who left us nearly £7,000 which helped us to acquire the site for Blackham House. In recent years, Robert Morton who lived on the Isle of Man, gave us over £16,000 during his lifetime; he was very moved when we asked permission to name a house after him. We have also recently had two donations of £50,000 and one of £10,000 from an anonymous benefactor whom we have been unable to thank. These large gifts enabled us to buy our office premises as well as providing some houses with carpets and wall-papers for corridors and attractive furniture for lounges. But we are just as grateful for the many, many smaller gifts, legacies and Deeds of Covenant which come to us regularly and help to keep us going. In our early days we could not have carried on without them. We need them just as much to ensure our future.

So that our charitable funds could continue to be used for additional benefits and would not be swallowed up in balancing our books because of rent restrictions, we set up a charitable trust in 1976. Since then we have asked for all gifts to be made payable to the Friends of Humanist Housing Association.

WHO'S WHO

Presidents

1961-65 Mrs. Margaret Knight
1965-71 Lord Willis
1971-76 Harold Blackham
1976-78 Mrs. Angela Willans
1978- Derek Marcus

Chairmen

1955-60 Edwin Fairhall
1960-68 Miss Rose Bush
1968-71 Lindsay Burnet
1971-73 Miss Diana Rookledge
1973-77 Miss Rose Bush
1978- Mrs. Ray Lovecy

Honorary Secretaries

1955-68 Lindsay Burnet
1968-70 Miss Rose Bush

Directors & Secretaries

1971-73 Lindsay Burnet
1974- Peter Ward

Auditors

1955-60 Mrs. Ethel Watts
1961-79 Philip Soper

The Present Committee

John Brown (since 1979)
Mora Burnet (since 1955)
Lindsay Burnet (since 1955)
Alex Dawn (since 1955)
Constance Dowman (since 1967)
Erica Haslam (since 1964)
Ted Henry (since 1959)
Albert Lovecy (since 1979)

Ray Lovecy (since 1977)
George Mephram (since 1979)
Diana Rookledge (since 1968)
Philip Soper (since 1979)
John White (since 1979)
Adrian D'Ews tenant member
(co-opted 1978)
Marthe Sinha tenant member
(co-opted 1979)

Architects

Alan Raimes
Clive Alexander & Partners
Henry Osborne Associates
Kenneth A. Williams & Associates

The Committee in 1955

Olga Blackham
Cicely Body
Ashton Burall
Lindsay Burnet
Mora Burnet

Clifford Culpin
Alex Dawn
Ursula Edgcumbe
Ena Elkan
Eric Elkan

Edwin Fairhall
Knight McDonald
Beatrice Pollard
Robert Pollard



Symonds Green, Stevenage

OUR HOMES

Ashton Court, Camden (named after Ashton Burall, Committee Member for 11 years).
36 flats for the elderly.

Balmoral House, Tunbridge Wells

30 bed-sitter flats with meals provided for the elderly.

Blackham House, Wimbledon (named after Harold Blackham, president for 5 years and Olga Blackham, Committee Member for 9 years). 21 bed-sitter flats for the elderly.

Blakeney Road, Stevenage

A five acre site with 125 flats and bungalows for the elderly and family flats and bungalows.

Burnet House, Hampstead (named after Mora and Lindsay Burnet, Committee Members for 25 years).

13 bed-sitter flats for people who have had mental illness.

The Chestnuts, Uxbridge

8 (eventually 36) flats for the elderly.

Cobbs Place, Chelmsford

31 flats for the elderly and for young working people.

Dawn House, Chelmsford (named after Alex Dawn, Committee Member for 25 years).

19 flats for the elderly.

Erica House, Wimbledon (named after Erica Haslam, Committee Member for 16 years).

18 flats for the elderly.

Fairhall Court, Surbiton (named after Edwin Fairhall, Committee Member for 5 years).

43 flats for the elderly.

Furnival Court, Tunbridge Wells

26 flats for the elderly.

Langham Court, Farnham

43 flats for the elderly.

Moray House, Surbiton

40 flats for the elderly.

Pennington Manor, Southborough

31 flats for the elderly.

Peverell House, Chelmsford

16 flats for the elderly.

Robert Morton House, St. John's Wood (named after Robert Morton, a major benefactor).

46 flats for the elderly.

Rose Bush Court, Hampstead (named after Rose Bush, Committee Member for 22 years).

57 flats for the elderly.

Sunhill Court, Pembury

54 flats for the elderly.

Sunhill Place, Pembury

11 converted flats for tenants investment.